

VALERIE JAUDON

Pattern painting has become the catch phrase for the work of numerous artists. In the case of Valerie Jaudon, one can look beyond the label and see an art that is both visually rich and intellectually challenging.

Initially, Jaudon's paintings resemble the elaborate patterns associated with Islamic art, Celtic manuscript illuminations, chair caning, and some textile designs. Her patterns are bold interlacing images which demand one's attention because of the great complexity and precision with which they have been realized. The patterns are contained on the canvas but have implications of extending beyond the picture plane. Oddly enough, the consistency of the patterns creates a bold and elaborate overall design which becomes so overwhelming that it flirts with chaos. Jaudon achieves a unique synthesis of order and disorder for one can look at her paintings, realize their organization, and still lose oneself in the density created by such an abundance of order.

The space in Jaudon's paintings, though not flat, is also not as deep as in the illusionistic work of Al Held. Jaudon does not use perspective. Her spatial cues are derived from occlusion, the overlapping and interlacing of the various bands that comprise the pattern. Many of the paintings are monochromatic except for lines of unpainted areas that frame the bands. This too contributes to the medium range depth of the paintings because of the ambiguous figure-ground relationship it establishes. Jaudon has told me that she is not interested in *tromp-l'oeil*, but rather prefers a more direct form of illusionism, one that is planar and geometric.

The concentric circles in *Waveland* and in *Mound Bayou* suggest a visual cone. While looking at these paintings, I got the sense of looking into a geometric landscape composed of highly abstracted horizontal, vertical, and diagonal elements. A distinct reference to architecture is made in *Courtland*, a beautiful copper color painting. In this work Jaudon has woven an arch-like motif into a design of boldly delineated hori-



Valerie Jaudon, *Mound Bayou*, 1978. Oil and metallic pigment on canvas. Courtesy Holly Solomon Gallery.

zontal, vertical, diagonal, and circular bands. Coupled with Jaudon's sense of pictorial space, the allusions to an architecturally dense and exotic place are unavoidable, especially when one learns that she is also interested in Islamic architecture. The bands in Jaudon's paintings can also be likened to paths or roads, somewhat like the aerial views of huge highway interchanges. That these paintings are concerned with architecture and landscape is also borne out when one considers their titles: *Waveland*, *Mound Bayou*, *Courtland*, *Leland*, and *Yocona*. All of these names refer to places in the vicinity of Greenville, Mississippi where the artist grew up.

Jaudon paints her patterns magnificently. First, she builds the pattern by dividing the canvas into sections and then reflects one section in another. In doing this, she creates a design puzzle which

is realized when the drawing is completed. Once the drawing is constructed on the raw canvas, Jaudon begins to paint. Surprisingly, she does not use a stencil or tape. In many of her works she applies oil and metallic pigment to the canvas in broad short strokes which are gestural. Jaudon feels that this emphasizes the handmade quality of her work and the short broad strokes also play off of the bold geometric design. Though paintings such as *Courtland* and *Mound Bayou* are monochromatic, Jaudon has made brilliant use of color and light by the variations created on the surface of the painting. The subtly variegated surface catches the light and reflects it with such a multiformity that the painting appears to shimmer and glow in a stunning and beautiful manner. Jaudon does not attempt to disregard or avoid beauty. She believes in a style of painting that

extends beyond the framework of narrow formalist art.

In the late '60s and early '70s Jaudon and several other painters (Joyce Kozloff, Tony Robbin, Miriam Schapiro, and Robert Zakanych) met to discuss the similarities of their work. The word they concurred on was not "pattern" but "decorative." For them, decorative stood for all the qualities left out of formalist painting. They saw themselves as a group of painters reacting against pure formalism and decided to continue to explore the decorative qualities in their art. In describing the work of Valerie Jaudon one can certainly use the word "decorative" but not in any pejorative sense. In respect to her work, 'decorative' means an art that is significant, beautiful, cryptic, and evocative. (Holly Solomon, October 4-25)